

# **Natural Heritage, Open Space, and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board**

Regular Meeting (via Zoom/teleconference)

October 13, 2022

## Minutes

**Board members present:** Tim Abbott, Karen Burnaska, Joe Gresko, Eric Hammerling (Co-Chair), Walker Holmes, Eric Lindquist, Amy Paterson (Co-Chair), Elanah Sherman, John Triana, and Joe Welsh (all by Zoom except Elanah, who attended by phone)

**DEEP representatives:** Allyson Clarke, Property Agent; Cameron Clegg, Environmental Analyst, LAM; Andrew Hoskins, Chief of Staff; Jamie Sydoriak, Environmental Analyst, LAM

**Guests (Public Comment):** Shelley Harms, Susan Masino, Duncan Wilber

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Eric H called the meeting to order at 10:31 AM.

### **Approval of September 8, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

On a motion by Amy, seconded by Karen, the Minutes were unanimously approved.

### **DEEP Staff Updates**

#### Status of 2021 Annual Report (due February 15, 2022):

Andrew reported that the final drafts for the 2020 and 2021 reports are completed. He will make the drafts available to the Review Board Chairs. Comments must be received by next Tuesday, October 18. The reports will be posted the next day on the DEEP site.

Updating 2016-2020 Green Plan: Andrew said that DEEP is still working on internal approvals. The eventual report will include a compilation of data on existing open space, as well as a progress report on meeting the preservation goal. Cameron said the Green Plan process will include reaching out to municipalities and land trusts to update data on acquisitions. He hopes this effort will contribute to access and equity initiatives,

OSWA Grant Submission Update/Other Funding/Program News: Andrew reported that the application deadline for the latest

round closed on September 29. DEEP received 18 applications for the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA) and two for the Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG). Total acreage is 1,140 (slightly more than last year). The estimated approved cost is \$9.5 M; maximum funding would be about \$6.2 M. Towns represented in the OSWA proposals are: Andover, Brookfield, Cornwall, East Haddam (two applications), East Lyme, Hebron, Morris, Naugatuck, New Canaan, New Hartford, Norfolk, North Branford, North Guilford, Pomfret, Salem, Washington, and Winchester. Of these, 13 applications were from land trusts. Eric H asked how many of the applications were submitted by new applicants; Allyson responded that only two or three were new. Andrew announced that seven applicants had taken advantage of the extension for appraisal reviews. In answer to a question from Amy, Andrew said that UGCG requests totaled \$62,000. (The municipalities of Haddam and Stamford submitted the UGCG requests.)

Status of DEEP's Proposal for Technical Corrections to C.G.S. Sec. 7-131d for 2023 Legislative Session. Amy reported that approved items should be posted by mid-November.

Other: Joe G suggested that a uniform definition of open space is crucial to an accurate open space count. Tim asked where DEEP is in the process of hiring a Land Acquisition and Management (LAM) director. Andrew responded that interviews have concluded and that the decision is in the final stages. Elanah proposed a future discussion on asking DEEP to establish a special funding pool for accessibility improvements on OSWA and UGCG-funded properties. In response to Elanah, Amy said that such a discussion would fit into the agenda of the next working group process.

**Discussion: 2023 Review Board Work Plan:** Amy will send out an email to Review Board members soliciting participation in the next phase of the working group. Walker proposed that the group be opened up to representatives from organizations that have received grants. Elanah suggested that the most vocal participants in the 'diverse voices' panel at the last CLCC conference be invited to participate (or sought for their opinion).

**Review Board Member Updates:** Amy invited members to suggest subject matters for the 2023 CLCC conference at Wesleyan on March 25th. Tim reported that Highlands reauthorization will be included in the broad land bill; that bill will likely be voted on before the new term. Among other things, it will include expansion of eligible communities. Karen announced the October 20 “A Day Without Water” webinar; she will send a link to Amy, who will then distribute to Review Board members. Walker asked the Review Board if it wants her to renew her research on state agencies in other states that offer grant programs for land conservation and park construction, using Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) stateside dollars as a source of funding for the grant programs. Having identified a few states that may provide good precedents for Connecticut, her next step is to identify agency staff involved in implementation. One challenge has been the large number of retirees. Amy encouraged Walker to continue the research. Walker added that she would like DEEP staff to weigh in at future Review Board meetings on the challenges of administering LWCF. Eric H said the topic would likely be a part of future Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) meetings.

### **Public Comment**

Shelley Harms, Executive Director, Cornwall Conservation Trust and Salisbury Association Land Trust:

Shelley asked if DEEP can dispense with its monthly reports and suggested that the agency consider creating a distribution system for its open space protection goal [of 21%], especially in view of the unequal monetary ‘hits’ absorbed by different kinds of communities.

Susan Masino, Member, Simsbury Open Space Commission and GC3 Science and Technology Working Group:

Susan concurred with Joe G that a uniform definition of open space would be valuable. She suggested that DEEP consider referencing the GAP status code from the USGS Protected Areas Database to arrive at a uniform definition. (Eric asked her to share particulars about the code with him and Amy.) Susan said she agrees with Shelley that urban, suburban, and rural communities possess varying capacities for preservation. In regard to accessibility, she asked if the OSWA program could fund accessibility modifications on an already preserved property. Susan announced that she would be offering a

workshop on landscape planning for mental health at the October 29 annual meeting of the Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions (CACIWC).

Duncan Wilber, Chair, Colebrook Inland Wetlands Commission and Board of Assessment Appeals; Member, Colebrook Board of Finance:

Alluding to at least one approved proposal involving his town, Duncan asked how applications are approved without municipal support. Andrew offered to contact Duncan after the meeting regarding this issue. Shelley noted that, in such cases, applicants get fewer points, and thus a lower award. Duncan agreed with others that a standard definition of open space would be advantageous and pointed to the language in CT Public Act 490 as a model. [See CT General Statutes 12-107b(3).]

### **Other**

Amy encouraged everyone to look at the Chat comments from this meeting. Tim mentioned that the tracking of the traveling moose on social media has revealed the usefulness of social media in providing valuable data and mobilizing the production of citizen science.

### **Adjournment**

On a motion from Amy, seconded by John, the meeting unanimously adjourned at about 11:22 AM.

**Respectfully submitted, Elanah Sherman, Secretary**

**Next meeting: Thursday, November 10, 2022, 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM**